

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) A press belt (~~11; 21; 31; 41; 51; 61; 71; 81~~) employed for pressurizing a zonal material, endlessly formed by an elastic material with the thickness progressively reduced from a central pressurizing portion (~~C₁; C₂; C₃; C₄; C₅; C₆; C₇~~) toward end pressurizing portions (~~A₁; A₁'; A₂; A₂'; A₃; A₃'; A₄; A₄'; A₅; A₅'; A₆; A₆'; A₇; A₇'~~).

2. (Currently amended) The press belt according to claim 1, wherein the thickness is progressively reduced from said central pressurizing portion (~~C₁; C₂; C₃; C₄; C₅; C₆; C₇~~) toward said end pressurizing portions (~~A₁; A₁'; A₂; A₂'; A₃; A₃'; A₄; A₄'; A₅; A₅'; A₆; A₆'; A₇; A₇'~~) by at least one type of technique selected from a group of a crown curve technique, a linear technique, a stepped technique and a trapezoidal technique.

3. (Currently amended) The press belt according to claim 1, including a cylindrical endless reinforcing base (~~12; 22; 32; 42; 52; 62; 72~~), a first elastic layer (~~13; 23; 33; 43; 53; 63; 73~~) located on the outer peripheral surface of said reinforcing base and a second elastic layer (~~14; 24; 34; 44; 54; 64; 74~~) located on the inner peripheral surface of said reinforcing base, wherein the thickness of said first elastic layer is progressively reduced from said central pressurizing portion (~~C₁; C₂; C₃; C₄; C₅; C₆; C₇~~) toward said end pressurizing portions (~~A₁; A₁'; A₂; A₂'; A₃; A₃'; A₄; A₄'; A₅; A₅'; A₆; A₆'; A₇; A₇'~~).

4. (Currently amended) The press belt according to claim 1, including a cylindrical endless reinforcing base (~~12; 22; 32; 42; 52; 62; 72~~), a first elastic layer (~~13; 23; 33; 43; 53; 63; 73~~) located on the outer peripheral surface of said reinforcing base and a second elastic layer (~~14; 24; 34; 44; 54; 64; 74~~) located on the inner peripheral surface of said reinforcing base, wherein the thickness of said second elastic layer is progressively reduced from said central pressurizing portion (~~C₁; C₂; C₃; C₄; C₅; C₆; C₇~~) toward said end pressurizing portions (~~A₁; A₁'; A₂; A₂'; A₃; A₃'; A₄; A₄'; A₅; A₅'; A₆; A₆'; A₇; A₇'~~).

5. (Currently amended) The press belt according to claim 1, wherein the difference between the thickness (~~C₁C₁'~~; ~~C₂C₂'~~; ~~C₃C₃'~~; ~~C₄C₄'~~; ~~C₅C₅'~~; ~~C₆C₆'~~; ~~C₇C₇'~~) of said central pressurizing portion and the thickness (~~A₁B₁~~; ~~A₁'B₁'~~; ~~A₂B₂~~; ~~A₂'B₂'~~; ~~A₃B₃~~; ~~A₃'B₃'~~; ~~A₄B₄~~; ~~A₄'B₄'~~; ~~A₅B₅~~; ~~A₅'B₅'~~; ~~A₆B₆~~; ~~A₆'B₆'~~; ~~A₇B₇~~; ~~A₇'B₇'~~) of said end pressurizing portions is 2 to 30 % of the thickness of said central pressurizing portion.

6. (Currently amended) The press belt according to claim 1, wherein said press belt (~~11~~; ~~21~~; ~~31~~; ~~41~~; ~~51~~; ~~61~~; ~~71~~; ~~81~~) is a papermaking press belt.

7. (Currently amended) The press belt according to claim 1, wherein said press belt (~~11~~; ~~21~~; ~~31~~; ~~41~~; ~~51~~; ~~61~~; ~~71~~; ~~81~~) is a shoe press belt.

8. (Currently amended) A shoe press comprising at least the press belt (~~11~~; ~~21~~; ~~31~~; ~~41~~; ~~51~~; ~~61~~; ~~71~~; ~~81~~) according to claim 1, a pressure shoe (~~82~~) applying pressure to said press belt and pressure regulation means (~~83~~) regulating the pressure of said pressure shoe.